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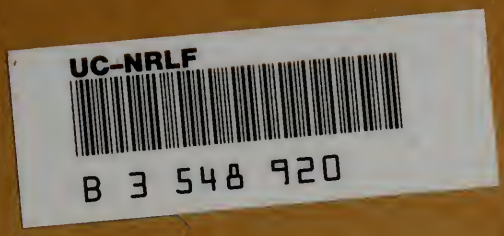

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Mary Queen of Scots:

A TRAGEDY

IN THREE ACTS,

BY

ROBERT BLAKE.

[SECOND EDITION.]

London:
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL AND CO., STATIONERS' HALL COURT.
1894.

William J. Smedley
from
Robert Blake

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Robert Hedley Thompson

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PREFACE.

PLAYS are written either to be read in the study, or to be acted on the stage. In the former case the play is simply a poem written in a particular form—in my opinion a most unnatural and inconvenient form. These plays are, like all affectation, generally bad; some of them are beyond measure insufferable, inflicting on an ear accustomed to the music of real poetry the keenest torture. Plays written for the stage, on the other hand, labour under the disadvantage of requiring for their perfect elucidation what some one has very happily called the "living commentary of the actors." The following play belongs to the latter class. It will not appeal strongly, except to the reader who is sufficiently familiar with the stage to supply to some extent this commentary for himself as he proceeds.

It is the same with the choruses. To realise their possible effect, it must be remembered that they are intended to be sung. It is the fault of all our modern drama that it does not use this most powerful of all effects, and that from opera alone are we able to realise the sublime heights to which the Greeks in their divinely beautiful choral poetry so often attained. And yet the popularity of some recent plays, in which music was introduced, appears to show that we are at least approaching a state of civilisation equal to that in which the Greek drama took its rise. It is my conviction that the production of such a play as this, inferior as it may be to the great masterpieces of the past, would reveal to the world that the general drift of popular fancy is not after all in the direction of decadence, and that the highest kind of dramatic art would now attract sufficient public support to permit of its revival.

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The story of Mary Queen of Scots has never yet been adequately treated in dramatic form. Schiller's play contains many fine passages, but it is deformed by the fact that not only history but probability is violated. *Incredulus odi* must be the comment of every one who reads, for instance, the scene in which a perfectly impossible meeting between the Queens of England and Scotland is represented to have taken place.

Mr. Swinburne's "Mary Stuart" is a libel not only on the Queen's character, but on her wit. He not only takes the view of her conduct as a wife, which Elizabeth and her Ministers so long and so successfully laboured to produce on the minds of their own generation, and which there is not a particle of real evidence to support, but he makes the most brilliant and accomplished princess of her age an almost insufferable bore. The greatest woman the human race has ever produced, a woman who in intellect, learning, literary and political ability, and energy, surpassed almost all the men of her time, as much as she excelled other women in grace and beauty, is made to maunder through page after page of dreary platitudes, to drone out line after line of often indifferent iambics, till the reader feels that her murderers may almost be forgiven, for that nothing but death could adequately punish such interminable prolixity.

Where such great writers have failed, and, in spite of his Mary Stuart trilogy, the author of "Atalanta" is a great writer, it is doubtless presumption of me to hope that I may succeed. I can only say, in excuse, that the spell which proved fatal to so many of poor Mary's admirers, has fallen upon me too; that I have been impelled by an irresistible impulse to do battle for her reputation, just as others were impelled to do battle for her life, and that I believe the picture here presented is far more like the reality than any that has yet been painted by other hands.

Mary Queen of Scots.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

THE QUEEN.
JANE KENNEDY (One of the Queen's Ladies).
Chorus of the Queen's Ladies.

SIR AMYAS PAULET (The Queen's Gaoler).
SIR ANDREW MELVILLE (Attendant on the Queen).
LORD BURLEIGH (Minister of Queen Elizabeth).
THE EARL OF SHREWSBURY.
THE EARL OF KENT.
Judges, Soldiers, &c.

ACT I.

SCENE—THE QUEEN'S ROOM AT CHARTLEY CASTLE.

Enter Sir Amyas Paulet, *reading a letter.*

PAULET. All must go forward in order.—We've managed to convince her Majesty, but to that on which we are determined, her consent she will not give, so we proceed without it.—She's written to the Queen of Scots urging to confess, and trust to her mercy. For

her it matters little, for confession must not save her, but for us 'twould be convenient, and silence those who might give trouble.—If some secret means be found of putting her away, you are to know we will not closely seek the cause, nor will they lack reward who render such a service.—WALSINGHAM.

That I'll not do, for done they'd turn and cast
All upon me. If they must have her life
Let them then take it—Little do they know her.
Were she in truth guilty a hundred times,
No torture from her lips would wring confession,
Much less as 'tis. Melville suspects us not.
Life has not taught him yet to trust no man,
He plays our game as he were one of us.

Enter Sir Andrew Melville.

How goes the plan ?

MELVILLE. All well ! The ladies ready.
May God reward you.

PAULET. When they're off, I rage
And lead pursuit where they have never gone,
But silence.

MELVILLE. Fear not I am heart and soul
In this attempt. To tell the simple truth
I have an interest of my own in it ;
For Mistress Kennedy, once the Queen is safe,
Has promised to fulfil a certain pledge,
I won of her a certain summer's eve.

PAULET. She of the bitter tongue ?

MELVILLE. That's her one side.
To me she shows the other. Sharp at times
But sweet, and faith she's pretty as her mistress.

PAULET *(aside)*. A doll whose strings her subtle mistress pulls.
Well : all apart from pity for the ladies,
And fellow-feeling for a good man's love—
For my own ease I want them from my way.

MELVILLE. Shall I not tell the ladies you are with us?

PAULET. Dost know so little, Melville, as to trust
A woman's ears with what she may not tell
To all she meets?

MELVILLE. Some have loose tongues like some men,
But some are safe.

PAULET. The less they know the safer;
Women, besides, judge not by reason, and law,
But by some nimbler faculty they have,
They try, acquit, condemn, all in an instant,
And we are true, or traitors at a glance.
Were I a thousand times your friend, Melville,
Your Jane, and her keen mistress would not think it.

MELVILLE. Why thus distrust yourself? An honest man
Cares less what others think, than what is true.
Why trust them not?

PAULET. I cannot tell you why,
It may be something in the nose, or eye,
That I observe—nor are they over civil,—
And for your Jane, she minces not her words,
But lets us plainly hear the ill she thinks.

MELVILLE. Often the steed that plunges at the start
Holds out the best. I stake my life she's true,
And for her courage, that you prove yourself.

PAULET. Such steeds suit open country, and straight riding,
We have to pick our way, and want more steady.

MELVILLE. I have no taste for windings underground,
Secrets with this, and mysteries with that,
I like the open field, the light of heaven.

PAULET. They are not frank and generous like yourself,
They're older, and know more; so tell them nothing.
Now I go hence: you stay, and urge them to it.
I play the surly gaoler while I must.
(Aside) Would God I were not forced to play so deep,
But Cecil's prying eye is everywhere.
Exit Paulet.

MELVILLE. Her whole heart's in the Queen—To me she gives
At times a careless sigh, at times a thought,
Yet are we men so made that foolish love
The more 'tis blown upon, the fiercer glows.

Enter Jane Kennedy and Chorus.

I.

CHORUS. The hour draws nigh; our country calls,
The crimson eve still glows.
But when the night from heaven falls,
These cursed and cruel prison walls,
For us and her unclose.

II.

Then swift as hare on native heath,
And swift as lark on high,
Without a sound, without a breath,
We leap on steeds that pant beneath,
And spring for liberty.

III.

The boats wait on the distant shore
By faithful laddies manned,
With swelling sail, and sweeping oar,
We'll dance along the watery floor,
To where the good ships stand.

IV.

And then our mistress, Scotland's Queen,
Will shine among her own,
No more shall she in voice or mien
Recall, but be what she has been,
A Monarch on her throne.

V.

The fearless heart they could not break,
The pride they could not bend,
Will burn, ere her vile gaolers wake,
Where sluggard may not overtake,
Nor harlot's hate extend.

VI.

Hurrah ! Hurrah ! for Scotland,
And for our lady dear,
In weal and woe by her we stand,
For her we've wept, for her we've planned,
For her, for her we cheer.

Enter Sir Amyas Paulet.

PAULET (*to Melville*). Why are these women thus allowed to make
The evening hideous with their Highland noise ?

JANE KENNEDY. We have been ladies, sir, to better bred,
And as for noise — God send us Highland husbands,
Whose sons we may instruct to wake such cries,
And wield such arms as those of Bannockburn.

PAULET. The liberty I give you still abuse.

JANE KENNEDY. You give but what you must, and that for shame
Your mistress dare not stint.

PAULET. Well, we shall see.
Where is the Lady Stuart ?

JANE KENNEDY. My mistress, sir,
Her Majesty, is where becomes her ill,
Kept here by one whose throne she ought to fill.

PAULET. Treason ! for less the Queen might have your head.

JANE KENNEDY. 'Twere better than her own.

PAULET. I came not here——

JANE KENNEDY. Would God it were so ; but you came unasked,
And are not pressed to stay.

PAULET. I came to see——

JANE KENNEDY. She will not see you now, sir.

PAULET. Presently
I shall return, and she must see me then.

Exit Paulet.

JANE KENNEDY. Must! Must! Ah! fallen Majesty!
'Tis thus
By every upstart slave thou art addressed.

MELVILLE. Why, sweetheart, waste your words—He
heeds you not.

JANE KENNEDY. I was her servant, Melville; aye, her
friend,
Ere her ill-fated foot on Scotland trod.
When by the splendour of her loveliness
Her royal state itself was all eclipsed:
When peers of France crowded around her throne
More to behold the woman than the Queen.
I see her now, her matchless grace and charm
Like sunshine quickening all whereon she beamed;
And one on whom she smiled, for very pride
All day would wear his pleasure on his lips;
And one to whom she gave her hand would fall
Upon his knees and worship; and the King
Her husband—How she is not mad I know not—
Would hang on her sweet lips, feed on her glance,
And with his love—*(bursts into tears)*—

MELVILLE. The present, not the past,
Concerns us now. Be ready, and no weakness
Hinder our plans.

JANE KENNEDY. Our nature's as her own;
Not bred in softness, but where women grow
Fit to be mothers of true men. This heart
No faintness felt in stern Loch Leven's castle
When she went forth clad as a common wench,
And played so well her part she passed the gates;
I stayed to seem the Queen.

MELVILLE. What then befell?

JANE KENNEDY. Alas! They brought her back - The
rowers knew not

What presence graced their boat, but laughed and joked,
And, when she spoke not, rougher sport essayed,
Thinking her as themselves. Then from her cloak
Her arm leaped forth to warn their boldness back,
And in the moonlight, like the driven snow,
Shone her white hand, most beautiful. They knew
No peasant's toil left fingers such as those,
And feared to save her.

MELVILLE. The vile cowards, the slaves.
Had I my hand upon their throats I swear
They'd choke 'ere I released them---Is she well?
Our lives rest on our swiftness in this night.

JANE KENNEDY. Alas! Poor soul! Torture has done its work.
Like some free creature of the woods confined
By cruel bars, her limbs have lost their swiftness.
No more as at Langside, when none in Scotland
So boldly rode, when her keen spirit had swept
To victory through traitor Murray's host,
Had men the heart to follow. Then she bore
Unharmed fatigues that tried the hardiest,
But now——

MELVILLE. What now?

JANE KENNEDY. Now 'tis another matter;
Her heart is high as ever; fear she knows not,
Nor ever knew, but there are times she seems
More fit for heaven than for such enterprise
As ours to-night.

MELVILLE. Hush! Paulet returns.

JANE KENNEDY. The prying knave! A hundred times a day,
Like Jack-in-the-box, he's in, and out, and in.
Why let him come. He dares not come to blows
Where he might win; with tongue I hold my own
Against a legion such.

MELVILLE. Small doubt of that,
But you, mayhap, are too severe a judge;
What if he help us?

JANE KENNEDY. Oh! Believe it not.
Think you an honest man would be their tool,
Their thumbscrew, their accursed rack, to plague us?
Whether she scorns him as the ground she treads,
Or if, aroused a moment by some outrage,
Her old fierce spirit flashes out upon him,
He hates her while he cowers, flies off awhile,
And then takes mean revenge in new intrusion.

MELVILLE. Let him not hear you.

JANE KENNEDY. Nay, but let him hear.
I would to God my voice might reach his mistress.

MELVILLE. I'll meet and keep him off.

JANE KENNEDY. That as you please.
I know not which is better to my taste,
To have him here for my abuse, or hence
For our relief, and her's. A cowardly cur.

Exit Melville.

Must! Must! Oh! Heaven! had I been born a man!
My friends, another song, lest we seem silenced.

I.

CHORUS. To men stout hearts the gods have given,
Strong limbs, or mighty mind,
To women weak all pitying heaven
Has other gifts assigned.

II.

Wit to delight, magic to charm,
And sweetness to retain—
Gentleness, anger to disarm,
And love sweet love to gain.

III.

Persuasion, passion to control,
And beauty to appeal.
Beauty, that harmony whose soul
We may not fix but feel.

IV.

But ne'er did beauty sense delight,
As her's who sad and slow,

[*Enter* The Queen *and* Melville.]

Like sunset sinking in the night,
Her prison paceth now.

They all kneel before The Queen.

THE QUEEN. Our sorrows, Melville, have at least this solace,
They sift the subtle flatterer from the friend
I doubt if our cold cousin in her splendour
Be not more truly lonely than ourselves.
Your love, my children, is the dearest joy
Left to us now. Arise; we may reward
Only with thanks your service; yet I think
You value that.

JANE KENNEDY. More than all other things.

THE QUEEN. My faithful friend, in every trial true.
What? Smiling through the tears? Nay! Nay! Be brave.
The end is near. Now leave us for a while.

Exeunt Jane Kennedy and Chorus.

Why do they tempt me, Melville? To be free
I will dare all, but never pay that price.
Little of life is left me; for that little
Shall I lose heaven, and stain my royal honour?
She, like myself, is Queen. Her life is sacred,
Should any coward attempt it at my bidding
Such fate be mine who vile example set.
I have refused, and hold to't.

MELVILLE. So, 'tis well.
I strive not with your Majesty on that.

THE QUEEN. Where do they steer for? I had rather try
For France than Scotland, for the strength has left me
That nerved before to strive with their mad factions.

And for my son, ah! God! through all these years
How I have lived in hope! How dreamed the days,
The months that crawled for me brought strength to him.
That the dull sun which rose, and set, and rose
In endless sameness might confirm his strength
Till he became a man. How I have prayed
The very winds to brace him till his heart
Might grow as was in better days my own.
What is he? Why! The peasant in the field
Would raise his arm against authority
To shield the womb that bare him. He, a king,
My blood and flesh, leans to my enemies,
And leaves me in my danger and despair.

MELVILLE. Madame, he is beset with evil tongues.

THE QUEEN. Such is the curse of greatness. In his heart
Is there no human love that yearns to me,
No voice within his ears that pleads for me,
Or, if no pity, fear that I forget
How he has lain beside my heart, and slept
Upon my bosom, fondling as he fed,
Forget and curse him?

MELVILLE. Madame, weep not so,
He will yet prove his love.

THE QUEEN. Alas! I know not—
I am ashamed of these unqueenly tears—
Since never Stuart was recreant before
I think the babe beneath my breast was cowed,
When Rizzio's screams rang in my startled ears,
When bloody Ruthven, and his father stabbed
The poor misshapen creature in my sight.

MELVILLE. That well may be.

THE QUEEN. What fiend possessed their souls
With jealousy of cripple such as he?
Had I been one my honour to forget,
My crown, my child, were there no men in Scotland?
Because it pleased to listen to his song,

Because his voice brought back sweet youth, and France,
And gentler manners. Ah! unhappy Queen!
To suffer thus alone were easier borne,
But to have ruin brought on every friend
That ever loved me——

MELVILLE. Madame, the night falls fast,
The moon has risen, our friends will soon be here.

THE QUEEN. At the first sign of danger, they will try
To murder me.

MELVILLE. Time will be short for them,
And they are ready who will stay their hands.

THE QUEEN. Then let us banish sorrow, and the past
And think of freedom—Send my women to me.

Exit Melville.

So often tried, so often failed before.
Is't now to be success? Too late! too late!
Dominion, majesty, to me are sounds
That tempt no more, no more. Against its bars
My soul has striv'n till its wild wings are torn
And useless. If the fires within at times
Blaze out, 'tis as when waves at ebb of tide
Sweep up the shore, and then sink deeper back.
To rest! to rest! Is there no rest on earth?
Oh! be it mine, if I am free to-night
To come to France, and in some blessed convent,
With holy women round me to the end,
Escape the storms that rage around a throne.

Enter Jane Kennedy and Chorus.

I.

CHORUS. To wait! to wait! How crawls the time,
Each moment is a year,
Slow, slow the stars in heaven climb
Yet are no comrades here.

II.

No voice of friend the silence breaks,
No signal from the hill,
No clattering hoof the drawbridge shakes,
No cries the castle thrill.

Oh! heaven protect the brave to-night,
And set our lady free.
No dread mishap her fortune blight,
No bloody treason check her flight,
To home and liberty.

THE QUEEN. How will our cousin hear the tidings, Jane?

JANE KENNEDY. I would not be the messenger to bring it
For half her kingdom. Why, she'll spit on him.
They say she spits in anger; and she'll swear
Like any trooper, and have off his head.
Cecil won't soothe her, Leicester won't console her,
Much less another.

THE QUEEN. Not the King of France,
Her former lover, who so quickly cooled?

JANE KENNEDY. 'Twas not to taste with him to be her spider.

THE QUEEN. What mean you?

JANE KENNEDY. In that race the Queens are strongest,
And eat their husbands up if they don't please them.
So farmers say.

THE QUEEN. He's safer where he is
(laughing) Though he thus want a kingdom, she an heir—

JANE KENNEDY. If that might be she had been married sooner.

THE QUEEN. In haste mayhap to silence scandalous tongues
Which none the less will wag.

JANE KENNEDY. She's much maligned
Or she has grounds for knowing how she stands.

THE QUEEN. She fears the expense of marriage. She is careful
And watches waste.

JANE KENNEDY. Judge by her royal presents, Madame, in your sore need ; two worn-out dresses
And beggarly supply of raggéd shifts.

THE QUEEN. Aye, when I claimed the sister's help she offered.

JANE KENNEDY. God knows if sister's true. They say she favours
Him of the many wives. If so, 'tis well,
Else her own mother knew not whence she came.

THE QUEEN. Judge not the dead. When monarchs choose to murder,
False evidence is easy to procure.
Then forgery and lies are loyal service,
And truth is treason. Has she not on us
Essayed to fix such crimes as in our place
Mayhap she had performed? And, when we scorn
To plead to such a charge, our very silence
Is held as proof.

JANE KENNEDY. Alas ! 'tis even so.

THE QUEEN. If guilty, her unhappy mother paid
A fearful penalty, whereof the thought
Sends the chill blood like ice to my cold heart.

JANE KENNEDY. Think not upon it, Madame——

THE QUEEN. That were well,
If thoughts might be obedient to the will ;
But there are times they are rebellious subjects,
And rise like ours in tumult. What of Melville ?
That were a lighter matter.

JANE KENNEDY. What of Melville ?
The same as heretofore. Sighs, and sighs, and sighs,
And I am hard of heart and he is patient,
And would be meek, obedient as a lamb,

If only I would give the upper hand.
Says more than he means, means more than he dare say,
And plagues me with his kisses when he may.
Tears, Madame?

THE QUEEN. For the past, the past, the past.

JANE KENNEDY. Nay! Let these ladies cheer us with their music.

I see, I may not win a smile to-day,
Though I confess more than I ever thought.

CHORUS. I.

Safer the secret way, the silent life,
The simple home where fond affection glows,
Than heights where passions meet in strife,
And blood in torrents flows.

II.

Dearer the joys, the love of lowly birth,
Where father, mother, child, at evening meet
To laugh around the glowing hearth,
Than thrones where princes greet.

III.

No thieves beset the empty peasant's way,
No plots perplex, no cares deny him ease.
He lives his life from day to day,
And God for him foresees.

IV.

But ah! for her who robbed of crown and throne,
Wretched, abandoned mother, widowed wife,
Imprisoned, outraged, and alone,
Drags out her weary life.

V.

Oh! who that loves her if we fail to-night,
Would wish her hours of anguish to prolong;
Would bid her stay, where vanquished right
Is ever slave to wrong?

Enter Paulet.

PAULET. 'Tis time this fooling cease.

THE QUEEN *(aside, to Jane Kennedy)*. Nay, let us fool him, since he calls it fooling.

JANE KENNEDY. When men make chairs of trees, they are but wood ;
When queens make knights of fools——

THE QUEEN. Chairs have their use,

JANE KENNEDY. As so have fools—for us to sit upon.

THE QUEEN. We wait, Sir ?

PAULET. Wait ?

THE QUEEN. That you, who seem so strange,
May be made known to us.

PAULET. I am no stranger.

JANE KENNEDY. Alas ! too true. Such truth will out like murder.

THE QUEEN. Seems it not, sir, an age since you were here ?

JANE KENNEDY. A month of minutes.

THE QUEEN. Why ! we've nigh forgotten
The nature of your countenance. That high brow,
That glorious eye, now kindling with great thoughts,
Now wet with pity for all things that suffer.
That stately step.

JANE KENNEDY. Welcome, if seldom heard.

THE QUEEN. Well ! we forgive his frequent absence, Jane,
He knows how easy 'tis to burden welcome.

JANE KENNEDY. If he know nought better, all his learning's little.

PAULET. I know not if your Grace untimely jests

THE QUEEN. Ah ! Sir, I've been when jests sprang to my lips
As light as lark to sky. Now all is changed.
Alas ! there is so little laughter now.

PAULET. Least lavish, Madame, longest lasts.

THE QUEEN. Our souls
Are mirrors, Sir, which picture their surroundings,
Mine once was lake, that glittered in the sun,
Reflecting the blue sky, the golden clouds,
The happy homes of earth, and the bright faces
That gazed to see their beauty in my depths.
Now, I am like Loch Leven, dark and dumb,
And full of shadows. At myself I shudder.

PAULET. I know not what to say.

JANE KENNEDY. Say nothing so,
And we are all the safer for your silence.

PAULET. Here, you've been well enough—well cared, well treated——

THE QUEEN. Well watched. Ah! Sir, my spirit is too free
For comfortable bondage. O'er my head,
Which might, you think, have lain in peaceful rest.
The years have rolled like waves above drowning;
And I, through all those years, have had no home,
No love—save from such faithful friends as this.
The innocent prattle of my child to me
Has brought no comfort, nor his manhood peace.
His little hands have never felt my face
To coax my kiss. Why, Jane, just now 'twas jests.
Truly, the founts of tears and laughter lie
So close they flood at times, and flow together.

JANE KENNEDY. This dismal presence has put out our laughter,
As foul air might a taper in a tomb.

PAULET. 'Tis time this fooling cease.

JANE KENNEDY Forgetful fool!
So said you once. What clumsy courtier's this?
Fie, fool! The jest is stale.

THE QUEEN. We are all fools, Sir,
Pursuing follies which we try to grasp,
And which elude us ever. Yourself, for instance,

Serving that shadow on a shadowy throne,
Think thus to earn those follies, place and power ;
And I—I wait the folly liberty,
Which may be nearer than we think, and yet
Prove other than we hope.

PAULET. Too true ! Too true !

JANE KENNEDY. We know what liberty he'd like to give us
Leave to pursue our murdered friends to heaven.

THE QUEEN. Let one life fail, and what have we become?
This weak, white hand, would then have power to crush
Ten thousand such as you, and all your honours
Would but remind how you deserve our favour.
Let us be friends.

JANE KENNEDY *(aside)*. He dares not stain her hand
With his false kiss.

PAULET. I do but what I must.

THE QUEEN. Nay, Sir, not so. 'Twere easy to obey
Your mistress's orders, and yet spare all insult
To us her equal.

PAULET. Madame, my homely wit
Is but ill match for yours. I meddle not
With reasons, but my duty I must do.
By her command your women sleep apart ;
'Tis time that they retire.

JANE KENNEDY. My mistress, Sir,
Of late is ill, and cannot rest alone,
Permit me stay with her.

PAULET. It may not be.

JANE KENNEDY. Is there no mercy? Must one bred as she,
Daughter of kings—a monarch from her cradle,
In sickness lack what e'en the poorest have ?

THE QUEEN. My child, we ask no favours. You do well
To rule, Sir, but to us to obey is strange ;
Let us within.

Exeunt The Queen, Jane Kennedy *and* Chorus.

PAULET. I like it less and less. A heart of stone
Would pity her, and he were less than man,
From whom her spirit won not admiration.
If it were only safe to side with her,
She'd find I can be soft as well as rude.
Now comes the worst of all—Melville must know ;
To keep him longer ignorant would risk
Rashness from him, and for myself suspicion.

[*Enter* Melville.]

Melville, to-night begins a tragedy.
'Tis fixed by those whose will we may not question
That Mary Stuart must die.

MELVILLE. If they knew all
That would seem doubtful.

PAULET. Why the Queen should bring
This guilt upon herself, this shame on England,
Let her examine. Sure the time were short
Had she left all the nature.

MELVILLE. Aye, indeed.

PAULET. Walsingham has betrayed her to a scheme
For her escape, in which you've played your part,
As I advised.

MELVILLE. Great God ! You have deceived me.

PAULET. You know her fearless nature—she has fallen
Into the trap.

MELVILLE. A trap ! a trap ! Oh ! fiends !

PAULET. To make her guilt deserve their punishment,
A plan to assassinate the Queen, our mistress,
Was part of their design ; but there they failed,
For none could gain her to such enterprise.

MELVILLE. Thank heaven! Then is she safe?

PAULET. I would it were so.
But power ne'er lacks fit instrument of ill.
What she refused, others have done instead.

MELVILLE. What! Forgery?

PAULET. They hold what bears her name,
But which she never saw, nor ever signed.

MELVILLE. Oh! this is damnable.

PAULET. And on the rack
In mortal agony, her instruments
Made false confession.

MELVILLE. May the villains writhe
In hell to all eternity for that.

PAULET. Poor wretches! They well knew the unwelcome truth
Would never purchase respite for their torments.
That she may be convicted of a part,
And thus men think all true that will be said,
The plot we have allowed to grow to head,
But ample force is here at hand to crush
All hope of rescue.

MELVILLE. Oh! sir, for love of heaven
Let her go free. Let all the fault be mine.

PAULET. The exchange were foolish. Though they use us thus
For their vile work they give no confidence.
Escape is hopeless. If we let her free
We free our own heads off our silly shoulders,
And she is elsewhere taken. All is ready.
Her friends in sight. The force in leash that hunts them,
And our poor captive eager for the net
That in its folds will cover her for ever.

MELVILLE. They come.

PAULET. Come hence. Come hence. I say you shall.

MELVILLE. I'll not be handled. In her hour of danger
My place is at her side, and she must know
What's meant against her. The whole world shall know.

PAULET. As you would save her, be not thus head-strong.
What can you do? Think you a feeble fly,
Perching between the hammer and the anvil,
Could thus avert the blow. Be prudent, wise.
She will have need of you hereafter, Melville.

MELVILLE. My curse be on your villainy, false knave.
What I know, all shall know of you and them.

PAULET. Your cry is not so loud but English steel
Could stop it in the throat; and for your knowledge
'Twere best to take it hence within your skull,
Else might we see it spattered on the wall,
And so for ever lost. Nay, if you will not—
Without there!

Enter four soldiers, who sieze Melville *and thrust him out.*

Exit Paulet.

Enter Jane Kennedy *and* Chorus, *dressed in readiness for a journey.*

CHORUS. Hush! Hush! No word, no breath betray,
The signal we have seen,
The night is past, now dawns the day
Of freedom for our Queen.

Hush! Hush! Their steps approaching fast
Tell us our friends are near.
Long, banished hope, at last, at last,
Returns to banish fear.

Enter The Queen, *dressed in readiness for a journey.*

The Chorus kneel before the Queen.

Oh! sovereign lady. In this hour of Freedom
Wherein we leave this home of weary woe,
Vouchsafe to us, thy faithful fellow captives
And loving servants, blessing 'ere we go.

Loud knocking and cries. The Queen sinks fainting on a couch.

JANE KENNEDY. Madame! Madame! Oh! heavens! She is dying.
Madame! My Lady! Oh! blessed mother of God.
Leave us not now.

Enter a number of armed men. The ladies rush to meet them, but recoil in horror.

JANE KENNEDY. Oh, villains, villains! These are not our friends.
We are betrayed. The Queen, they've come to kill her!
Treason! The Queen! Melville! oh, save her, save her!

The Queen recovers consciousness and slowly rises.

Enter Paulet *and* Melville.

THE QUEEN. Why this intrusion, sir?

PAULET. Your pardon, Madame.

THE QUEEN. The headsman craves, and gets it ere he strike.
Another search? To such indignities
We are accustomed, though their cause we know not.

PAULET *(reading a paper).* Madame, this tells that you have late conspired
To force escape from hence.

THE QUEEN. A criminal
Had done no less, 'tis true.

PAULET. That you have plotted
Death for Her Majesty the Queen, in hope
To fill her throne.

THE QUEEN. We plot our cousin's death
To fill her throne?

PAULET. Madame, you thus have earned
The fate that follows treason.

THE QUEEN. To the proof.

PAULET. The proofs are in safe hands, and in good time
Will be examined. Even now the lords

Appointed to be judges in the case
Are on their way from London.

THE QUEEN. Who are they
Who dare to sit in judgment on a queen?
We have been born above such courts. We own
Allegiance only to the God of justice,
Who tries all treachery. Ah, I see all now.
Betrayed, deserted, tortured, even to die
In peace is not permitted. The poor months
We might have lingered in our misery
Must be cut short. Nor is e'en that enough.
That honour may be taken with the life,
Lest Europe, in abhorrence of this outrage,
Lest France, where we have reigned, lest Scotland rise
For justice, this accursed mockery
Of courts precedes the final, piteous scene.
Minions of her, whose hate has held us here,
Take back our answer. Perjured harlot's breast
Fed not these lips. No bastard stain defiles
Our royal race. Within these burning veins
The blood of kings disdains defeat and death.
This body you may wound. These hands are weak
Nor can resist you; but the soul within
She shall not conquer. On that bloody Throne
Which in the sight of God, and of His church
Is ours, the Queen of England is less great
Than shall be in her murder Mary Stuart.

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

SCENE I.—A Corridor at Fotheringhay Castle, leading to the Hall of Judgment.

Enter Melville *and* Jane Kennedy.

Jane Kennedy. This may not, must not be till she is safe ;
What you have done for us has gained, I grant you,
The little of my heart was left to win,
The larger part you had before. But now
A truce to trifling. As they say in Scotland,
More distance, and less liberty, my friend.

Melville. Scotch lassies, as it seems, are hard to win.

Jane Kennedy. And hence the better wives. I've told the Queen.

Melville. What will she do ?

Jane Kennedy. None better know than she
To use her powers. Foreseeing this she sent
Long since to Scotland, and in spite of spies,
Letters have gone to France, to Spain, and Rome.
This to Elizabeth. He starts to-day.
Let him give't to none save her for whom 'twas writ.

Melville. If there he fails ?

Jane Kennedy. Why then we are no worse
Than as we stand. He must away at once,
Draw rein nor night nor day. Swift steed, hard road,
And steady heart bring him to victory..
The times are urgent, mischief in the air,
And she, though heaven has given her wondrous wit,
Is but one woman pitted 'gainst a host.

Melville. Little her wit will serve, or our endeavours.

Jane Kennedy. Oh ! I have feared it. Is this then the end ?

Melville. Have you not heard that there is war with Spain ?

That mighty armaments fill all her ports,
Equipped to sail for England?

JANE KENNEDY. War! War! War!

MELVILLE. They hoped to find a party for her here,
And so to deal with a distracted foe.

JANE KENNEDY. If she were free! If she were only free!

MELVILLE. Ask hungry tigress to release her prey,
Then ask Elizabeth to free her rival.
She dares not if she would; fate strong as steel
Holds them in grip; and one of them must die.

JANE KENNEDY. She dare not shed her royal sister's blood,
And fix upon her fame a foul reproach.
The very principle of monarchy
Is here at stake. Strike her, she strikes herself,
And every throne in Europe feels the blow.

MELVILLE. There is one hope. Could she but bow the head
That never yet has bowed; resign all claims;
Humble herself to dust; accuse herself
Of all they falsely charge, and on her knees
Ask pardon——

JANE KENNEDY. If their hatred could distort
Her limbs with every torture taught in hell,
She would not yield an inch. None know as I.
In heart of man no spirit ever dwelt
More proud and fearless. No! Ten thousand lives
She will resign, ere she accept dishonour.

MELVILLE. Let us persuade her. 'Tis the only hope.

JANE KENNEDY. If that be all our hope, 'tis all too little.
Heard you the King of France has made request
That she be given counsel at the trial,
And all things meet for her defence?

MELVILLE. 'Tis so,
They have replied she is unworthy of it,

And so refused.

JANE KENNEDY. Incredible!

MEVILLE. 'Tis true.

JANE KENNEDY. She is refused. She, whose divinest mercy
Made it her law in Scotland, that the poorest
May claim what she's denied. Now may high Heaven,
Left as she is, inspire her to confound them.

Enter Lord Burleigh *and* Paulet.

PAULET. Your mistress will be ready at the hour?

JANE KENNEDY. No readiness is wanted, sir. The Queen
Respects her guests but little, and will make
Small fuss to entertain them.

[*To* Melville.]

That a man,
I'd cut a better from a cabbage stalk.

Exeunt Jane Kennedy *and* Melville.

BURLEIGH. The wench is ready, Paulet, with her tongue.

PAULET. The maid is as her mistress. Would to God
The Queen had laid the task on any other!
It is forbid to come to blows with them,
And so they best me, having choice of weapons.

BURLEIGH. What of the Queen?

PAULET. A thousand devils possess her.
Fierce as a tigress, fearless as a hawk,
Using such arts as wit of man must fail
To conquer in the end. Give her but time,
And means, however slight, and she will reign
In England yet. We stand upon a mine.
No servant can I trust. She has bewitched them.
One comes to-day believing all he's told,
And finds the sinner is a slandered saint.
To-morrow he will die to do her bidding.

BURLEIGH. So would it be with us, and so they meet not.

PAULET. Captive she calls herself! As is the spider,
Which, unseen, lurks within her secret den,
Ready to pounce. All Europe is her web,
And every subtle string of policy
Has here its centre. Every thrill she feels,
And every sign of danger to our mistress
She springs at, thinking that the hour has come.

BURLEIGH. And yet Her Majesty oft' longs to see her.
"Why should we fear the Queen of Scots," she says.
You know what women are—mere weathercocks,
Turned with a gust. We may not tell her why,
Or we might lose our precious heads on it.
But men have eyes in England, as elsewhere.

PAULET. I wish we saw our way to make an end.

BURLEIGH. 'Tis what we do see. This must be allowed.
She'll make fine fight no doubt; but after this
We make swift work, and action outstrips words.
She comes——

PAULET. For God's sake let us hence. I'd rather face
A troop of horse, than bear the battery
Of her sharp tongue.

Exeunt Burleigh *and* Paulet.

A procession of judges and attendants passes by, followed by men at arms. After a brief interval, enter The Queen, Jane Kennedy *and* Melville.

THE QUEEN. Now to this business.
How of the Judges?

JANE KENNEDY. If the universe
Had each for centre, there were not more pomp.
So long they've crawled before a queen, to judge
Her equal turns their weak brains inside out.
Their faces grave, portentous, eyes severe.
Their words a tragedy, their voices terror,
Their noses scorn. With clasping hands in front

They bear about their stomachs, as though Atlas
Had plucked the tumbling world from off his shoulders,
And waddled it in front.

THE QUEEN. In such a mind
These slaves come here to deal with life and death.

JANE KENNEDY. Like children playing grown folk, from beneath
Their masks smirks out at times their littleness.
Curious to see one famous as yourself,
Yet half alarmed their wits stand not the encounter,
Which Cecil, fearing, waits at hand to watch,
Like Satan driving to their tasks the damned.

THE QUEEN. What of their train?

JANE KENNEDY. As though in fear each brings
A mighty retinue of men-at-arms.
The town is gorged, and all the country round
Is scattered with her surfeit, tents, on tents.

THE QUEEN. Some great affair is as it seems afoot.

MELVILLE. No less than great since it concerns your Grace.

THE QUEEN. They dare not touch my life. My son's protection
Is as a shield of steel against their hate.
Men love not to offend their future King,
Howe'er the present bid.

MELVILLE. Alas! how know we
Hurt to your Grace were great offence to him?

THE QUEEN. Have I not, from my prison, struck through him
At traitors, who abused my hour of weakness?

JANE KENNEDY. To punish at your bidding cost him little.

THE QUEEN. Have Morton, Lindsay, after many days
Not felt my power? Was he not then my son?

JANE KENNEDY. Bid him vacate your throne, if you would try him;
Bid him make war on her, and set you free.
Men call him coward.

THE QUEEN. The royal blood of Bruce
Flows in no coward.

MELVILLE. Set him some spendid task,
Whose doing may fling back into their teeth
Such calumnies, and prove him your true son.

THE QUEEN *(to Jane Kennedy).* Have you forgotten when he fled from Gowrie
That tapestry we wove? On desert ground
A lonely lioness, and at her side
Her little one; and how we wove beneath
Our own case, *Unum quidem sed leonem.*
He took the field and crushed the traitors then.

JANE KENNEDY. All victories, Madame, are not Bannockburn,
Nor every victor Bruce.

THE QUEEN. He loves me still,
And nature in his heart crys out for me,
And makes him hero in his mother's cause.

MELVILLE. Madame, his youth knew not your tender care,
And other influence——

THE QUEEN. Nay, Sir, his mind
Is like my own—sees all things for itself.
Have you not heard, when opening Parliament,
Held when my little Prince had but four years?
After the speech—which, by the way, he read,
Babe as he was, without a fault—he spied
The sky through the torn roof, and pointing to it,
Cried out, "I see a hole in Parliament."

JANE KENNEDY. If holes might stand for faults, an eye less bright
Might see a million such.

MELVILLE. Small doubt of that

THE QUEEN. Keen sight and courage in his infant mind
Were infants then, and since have gained full stature,
My pretty bearn!

MELVILLE. Madame, I fear to offend
Whom I most love, yet must I speak it out
In our great danger lean not on false hope.
There is no safety if our eyes are fixed
On what we wish, rather than on what is.
Make peace with those within whose power you lie
While there is time.

JANE KENNEDY. So be your dear life safe.

THE QUEEN. If he be not my friend, why should I live?
For him, and those to come, I've held my place.
Poor, broken-hearted captive, as I am,
That one prerogative they cannot touch.
Mother of England's kings—though she be Queen,
My honour is more precious far than hers,
For that dies with her, mine survives through me,
And none shall truly say, So help me God,
That I have left a heritage of shame.
Or live, or die, I bend the head to none.

Enter Paulet.

PAULET. Madame, their lordships wait.

THE QUEEN. And so 'tis fitting
We come in our own time.

PAULET. Madame, it must——

THE QUEEN. Wait on your betters, Sir. Crawl where they use you,
Loathing the while. When they are hence, resume
Your airs of office, and oppress a woman.

PAULET. Your temper, Madame——

THE QUEEN. Has been tried at times,
And stood the test. We use it as we please.
'Tis slave, not master, like thyself.

PAULET. I'll hence——

THE QUEEN. 'Twere best. Such knights owe safety to their heels
Oftener than to their valour.

[*Exit* Paulet.]

Come, let us go. Discourtesy
Belongs as little to our rank, as haste.

Exeunt The Queen, Jane Kennedy, *and* Melville.

SCENE II.—HALL OF JUDGMENT. JUDGES ASSEMBLED. A CHAIR IS PLACED IN FRONT OF THEM FOR THE QUEEN.

Enter The Queen, Jane Kennedy *and* Melville.

THE QUEEN *(to Melville, as she takes her seat).* Alas! How many counsellors are here?
And yet not one for me,
Our place is where you sit, Sirs, your's beneath.
If we accept things as they are, dream not,
We recognise your office. We are here
For weighty reasons which concern ourselves.

The Queen takes her seat, Jane Kennedy and Melville standing behind her.

BURLEIGH. By order of Her Majesty the Queen
We are assembled here, my Lords, to try
This lady, who has set on foot a plot
To kill Her Majesty, and seize her crown.

THE QUEEN. 'Tis England's law that those accused be judged
By jury of their peers. Where are my peers?

BURLEIGH. Do you plead, Madame, to this charge of treason,
Guilty or not guilty?

THE QUEEN. We plead not either, since we stand upon
Our rights as sovereign. We are Queen as she.
Treason regards but subjects.

BURLEIGH. We come to the indictment none the less.
You have conspired to make escape from hence.

THE QUEEN. We were unworthy of our place and blood
Had we done other. Not without request
We came to this inhospitable land.
Often your mistress tempted us to fly
From our rebellious subjects to her arms,
Calling us kin, and dearest friend, and sister;
Yet after Langside, when we tried her love,
We found ourselves entrapped.

BURLEIGH. This is confession
Of that part of our charge. The graver matter
Is of the assassination of the Queen.
Madame, you are accused of this. Your servants
Have made confession.

THE QUEEN. Is it England's law
That such consent be wrung from those by torments
Who else had spoken truth? Whom torture left,
Like garments soiled when they have served their turn,
To perish in repentance of their sin.
We know, sirs, that these wretched men refused
To hold to what was torn from their despair,
And died with curses of the hate which robbed them
Of honour as of life. Why were we not
Confronted with them, if indeed true justice,
Not murder, were in question?

BURLEIGH. This, your writing
Proves to the hilt.

THE QUEEN. That is no work of ours,
But bare-faced forgery. If the charge be true,

Why not show up what we ourselves have signed?
You know you cannot. Yet you think to win
Consent of others as defeat of us,
And browbeat one who fears your mistress little,
And less yourselves. You may not do it, sirs;
We've led your betters in the open field.

BURLEIGH. Your guilt seems certain, madame.

THE QUEEN. If 'twere truth,
'Twere but what she attempts on us herself.
And so, we being her rightful sovereign,
Born in true wedlock, not in bastardy,
The treason's hers. Why waste we words on that?
None better know than you who sit and judge,
Wearing the mask of justice on your faces,
Whence came this document, and how procured.
What further charges?

BURLEIGH. Are not these enough?

THE QUEEN. Enough, sir, for your purpose. That we grant.
Less would have served, and left yourselves less guilty.
But since, my Lord, you've feared to state the truth,
We do so for you, and give our reply.
My crimes are these: my birth, the injuries
That I so long have suffered, and my faith.
The first, I'm justly proud of; for the second,
Though wronged, I can forgive; and for the third,
In all my sorrows, it has been my hope,
My only consolation, and my trust.

BURLEIGH. Refusal to deny we hold confession.
The prisoner we hold guilty of the charge.
The sentence of the court we will consider.

THE QUEEN. We know it, sir, already. 'Twas determined
Ere you and she began your snare to weave.

[*Rising.*]

And so this farce has ended. You have played
Your part, we ours; our audience is not here.

Europe, and those unborn our words attend,
And they will fix where lies the victory.

BURLEIGH. Your only hope is in our mistress' mercy.

THE QUEEN (*passionately*). Your mistress recks as little as yourselves
Of right or justice. If she dare to strike,
We hold our life not worth a farthing's fee.
If she draw back, we thank her not, for fear
And policy alone arrest the blow.
She has conspired, forged, tortured to procure
Our ruin. We have torn the foolish mask
From her hypocrisy. This sham of a court
Serves her but ill. Had she without assailed,
Her crime had not been greater, and less vile.
For you: bethink yourselves what's in your souls,
For that will surely live within for evidence,
Till all is ripe. To us that form of death
Which swiftest comes seems best, and we await it.
Who knows what lingering torments of the mind
May this on each of you, and her avenge.
And so we come to that which brings us here.
Our places are reversed. 'Tis we accuse,
You who are charged, and our just judge is He
Who sits above all thrones, and to whose eye
The secrets of all hearts are as a book.
Prepare your mistress' answer. Life is short.
Though we precede her to that final court,
She knows not in what hour she may be called.

Exeunt The Queen, Jane Kennedy, *and* Melville.

SCENE III.—THE QUEEN'S ROOM AT FOTHERINGHAY.

Enter the Chorus, *followed by* Paulet.

PAULET. Your mistress is no longer Queen.

CHORUS. Liar! Who can unmake one born a Queen?

PAULET. She now is but a private criminal.

CHORUS. The crime is theirs, who call her criminal.

PAULET. Awaiting death for treason.

CHORUS. Her fame shall live, and slanders of her foes
Shall yet come back on all who sent them forth.

PAULET. These vanities must be removed.

CHORUS. Wither her hand who first puts hand thereto.

PAULET. Heard you my words?

CHORUS. We heard, but heed not.

PAULET. Remove them.

CHORUS. Out, traitor, coward, oppressor of the weak;
Such task is not for us. Out, slave! Out, tyrant!

PAULET. Others shall do what you refuse.

Exit Paulet.

Enter a number of workmen, who proceed to remove all the ornaments and pictures, among others a crown and shield bearing the arms of England. They then hang the walls with black stuff. The Chorus retire in alarm to one corner of the stage,

FIRST WORKMAN. We must be smart at this, boys.

SECOND WORKMAN. Fall to, then.

FIRST WORKMAN. Poor little dears! They're like a lot
of doves,
Frightened of us.

SECOND WORKMAN. You leave them girls alone.
The room's got to be ready for the lady,
By she comes back. Ye 'ave no time for starin'.

CHORUS. When day declines and shades of evening fall,
And silent footsteps of the coming night
Steal to that inward sense which is not sight,
Hearing, nor touch, but deepest of them all;
From that which seems we turn away,
And to the One that is in silence pray.

FIRST WORKMAN. This is a job !

SECOND WORKMAN. I never liked one less.

FIRST WORKMAN. Nice music, mate, and pretty wenches, too.
If I'd no work, there'd be some sport afoot.

SECOND WORKMAN. Young men are restless ; we who have our homes,
Fret little.

FIRST WORKMAN. Naw—for your old woman keeps ye
Quiet enough. We'll all get married some day.
What say you, miss ?

SECOND WORKMAN. Leave the ladies alone. Ye've frightened 'em.
Sing again, ladies, and drive the Devil out of he.
Here, give a hand you ; ye're
Not paid for grinnin'.

FIRST WORKMAN. Damn work.

CHORUS. We need no words for that communion deep ;
We need no ear our message to receive ;
From soul to soul it flows, and we believe
That He will give His peace, will send His sleep ;
That He will safely guide our flight
Through the dim passage of the darkling night.

FIRST WORKMAN. Crowns are best on the wall, for in the hand
This weighs enough. What say you, mate ?

SECOND WORKMAN. Small wonder heads that wear them fall at times.

FIRST WORKMAN. It'll be fine sight to-morrow for them as sees it.

SECOND WORKMAN. No worse.

FIRST WORKMAN. I know a lad could put her to better use
Than they mean to. Hast seen her, mate?

SECOND WORKMAN. Riding at times with all the soldiers round her.

FIRST WORKMAN. Swords drawn! I wish to God I'd been a soldier.

SECOND WORKMAN. To cut her down, if she might try to escape.

FIRST WORKMAN. Never! She's grand to look at.

SECOND WORKMAN. I'd rather have my own to live with.

FIRST WORKMAN. And so not I.

SECOND WORKMAN. She'd never do for scrubbin'.

FIRST WORKMAN. Damn scrubbin'.

SECOND WORKMAN. The floor'd be foul before she rinsed it.

FIRST WORKMAN. Damn rinsin'.

SECOND WORKMAN. I'd not be in her shoes for all her grandeur.

FIRST WORKMAN. Damn everything. God never made such head
For such a turn as she's come to.

Enter The Queen *and* Jane Kennedy.

THE QUEEN. What means this, sir?

SECOND WORKMAN. We're at what we've been set to.

FIRST WORKMAN. By order of Sir Amiable Paulet.

JANE KENNEDY. Finish and go. Her Majesty is ill.
Are you such knaves, idiots, and brutes
You cannot go when told, but must stand staring.
Madame, dear Madame. Fools, I say, begone.

First Workman. Pity! Pity! Damn everything.

Exeunt Workmen.

Jane kneels at the Queen's side.

The Queen. Thank you, dear.

They whisper together.

Exit Jane Kennedy.

The Queen. Oh! black, black, black as ingratitude,
Black as their cruelty, black as the future.

Chorus. When shades of death perplex the clouded mind,
And life's long journey darkens to its end,
We turn to Him, who is the future's Friend,
From all the weary road we leave behind,
At sunset of our little day,
He only can protect, and guide the way.

Jane Kennedy returns, bearing in her hand a large crucifix, which she hangs up where the crown had been.

Enter Paulet, The Earl of Shrewsbury, *and* The Earl of Kent.

The Queen *(to Shrewsbury).* Ah! my old friend, my kind and courteous host,
You come like spring after the weary winter.
Bring you good news, my Lord, or are you here
To talk of all our pleasant times at Sheffield?
What! Tears?

Paulet. Madame, to-morrow at the hour of eight
The Court has fixed that you be led from hence
To suffer for your treason.

The Queen. They've no warrant.

Paulet. Her Majesty has sent it.

The Queen. So at last
The evil in her soul o'ercomes the good.

The Queen rises: leads them beneath the crucifix and points to it.

THE QUEEN. Upon the midnight she has made for me,
There is the star will lead my bark to rest.
We shall be ready.

Exeunt Paulet, The Earl of Shrewsbury, *and* The Earl of Kent.

How is it, Jane? What? No more bitter jests
To cheer us. Could I weep as thee, the load
Upon my heart might melt away in tears,
But there are thoughts that freeze the tender spring,
And leave all hard as winter.

JANE KENNEDY. Ah! dear mistress!
My noble mistress! My best, truest friend!
Would I might follow thee as at Loch-Leven,
When I plunged in and swam through the black lake
Rather than leave thee. Where thou goest now
I may not follow; none may follow more.

CHORUS. Then shine the souls whom we have lost, and love,
Before us, like the stars within the sky,
To promise, though our own eclipse be nigh,
That there are worlds of other light above,
That we may come to them, and share
The glory of the eternal splendour there.

Sounds of hammering are heard. All listen, awe-struck. Jane Kennedy stops her ears, and breaks into a paroxysm of weeping. The Chorus gather round the Queen.

THE QUEEN. Weep not, my little band, my faithful friends,
For 'tis no scaffold that they build for me,
But ladder leading to a throne on high.

Enter Melville.

MELVILLE. A messenger has come from Scotland, Madame.

THE QUEEN. Yes, from my son. Why are your looks so downcast?
Where is the messenger?

MELVILLE. He may not come.
But I have brought the message from his lips.

THE QUEEN. He saw my son?

MELVILLE. He found the King engaged
With Wotton, the ambassador from England.

THE QUEEN. What then? What then?

MELVILLE. Let me entreat you, Madame,
To calmly hear what I am loth to say.

THE QUEEN. Torment me not with these delays. Say on,
Nor aught withold. It can but be a message
Of love and pity, coming from a son
To his most wretched mother. Say the truth,
Nor spare me if't be other than I hope.
I must know all, though every word may stab me.

MELVILLE. The King at first refused to be disturbed,
At length gave grudging greeting. Heard him half,
And then impatient named another time,
Protesting 'twas not urgent.

THE QUEEN. If he bore
The least delay 'twas treason to his charge.

MELVILLE. No fault was his. He pressed him to the point.
Judge him not hardly, Madame. He is young,
And kingship is his toy. He played therewith,
Assumed an air of wisdom, that in truth
Suits him but ill, and less the heavy time;
Blamed your unreason; urging that your plots
Brought into peril his important dealings,
And much endangered his succession here.
'Twere best indeed you know the whole truth, Madame.

THE QUEEN. What fiend impels you to advise unasked?
Keep to your text; we comment for ourselves.

MELVILLE. The Queen had promised him you should be safe,

And treated as became you.

(*Sounds of hammering outside.*)

Then he showed
Her writing to himself, wherein she proved
How she'd been his protector from his youth ;
Preserved him from all danger from yourself,
And others ; firmly fixed his crown in Scotland ;
And made succession sure to her own seat
In time to come. That you should be restrained
From meddling in his business and his place,
He thought most useful ; and he bade advise
Patience and prudence.

(*Sounds of hammering outside.*)

He would not be driven
To strive against his interest with his cousin,
Who'd been to him a wise and careful mother.
Madame ! Madame !

THE QUEEN. Oh ! death to this were sweet.
She fools him till too late. He shall not reign
Nor longer she. We leave our rights to those
Who will enforce them. Oh ! that these ears were blasted
Ere I had heard it.

[*Kneeling.*]

Hear me, pitying Heaven !
Visit with every damnéd plague this son
Who thus deserts me. May he find her friendship
Poisonous as I have ! Standing where he does,
May all on whom he leans be false to him !
If wedded, may the partner of his bed
Loathe and dishonour who is less than man !
If father, may his children be as he,
Pursuing him with hatred to his end !
May all the damned howl round his bed of death
Till he be hurled to uttermost perdition !
And may his ears to all eternity
In deepest Hell ring with a mother's curse !

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE—The Queen's Bedchamber (darkened). An Altar in one corner, at which the Chorus are kneeling; they chant at intervals in a low tone. Jane Kennedy at the bedside, where the Queen is asleep.

Enter Melville.

Melville. Jane.

Jane Kennedy. Hush!

Melville! They've sent me to prepare her.
On me the task is fixed for punishment.
I take it gladly; other lips were rougher.

Jane Kennedy. Oh, let her sleep a little longer, Melville.

Chorus. In the valley of the shadow,
In the hour of agony,
In the tempest and the danger,
Miserere Domine.

The Queen (*asleep*). Miserere Domine.

Jane Kennedy. Oh, Melville, it has been a fearful night.
At first we thought her woes had made her mad,
For she was bright, and laughed, and chatted gaily,
And never her keen wit more splendid shone.

Melville. Poor soul!

Jane Kennedy. She spoke of death as liberty
And of the suffering that the day would save her.

Melville. And fears not?

Jane Kennedy. Thinking only of her honour
Praying for strength to bear herself a Queen
In her extremity, and warning all
That to her royal kinsmen, and her son
The truth be told, lest some unworthy story
Be spread by enemies.

MELVILLE. 'Tis what they'll do

JANE KENNEDY. Then she went through the trifles she has left us,
Wishing for our sakes she had more to leave.
To one a crucifix, to one a jewel,
To me as token of her dearest love
A ring she ever wore.

MELVILLE. Your weeping wakes her.

CHORUS. When the sands of life are sinking,
And the darkness draweth nigh,
Father, strengthen human weakness,
Miserere Domine.

THE QUEEN (*asleep*). Miserere Domine.

JANE KENNEDY. At times she seemed to wander, and forget
What she would say, and gazing out beyond us,
Would speak as to herself, or to some phantom,
Touching on bygones.

MELVILLE. Earth has grown to Hell,
When men commit such hellish cruelties.

THE QUEEN (*asleep*). My husband dead; I fear to go to Scotland.

JANE KENNEDY. She's thinking of the King of France.

MELVILLE. God help her.
For man no longer may.

JANE KENNEDY. Then she lay down
And fell asleep, while we all watched beside her.
Oh! she was so restless, turning on her bed,
And moaning, as though fearful dreams possessed her;
And now she called for aid, and Bothwell named,
Accursed destroyer! Now again 'twas Knox,
And she would cry, "Have I deserved these insults?"

MELVILLE. Hush! Hush! She stirs!

THE QUEEN (*asleep*). Oh, fiends! what hearts are theirs
To credit it.

CHORUS. When false friends desert and leave us,
And ungenerous calumny
Every action turns to baseness,
Miserere Domine.

JANE KENNEDY. Then she awoke, and seeing us around her
And the still room, and lights subdued, her thoughts
Fled back to Scotland, where her son was born.
And rising up she beckoned with her finger,
And smiled, and whispered that her pain was over,
And bade me bring the Prince unto her bed.

MELVILLE. Is he a man that he can thus desert her?

JANE KENNEDY. Then she remembered, and she laid her head
Upon my shoulder, and her soft white arms
Clung round my neck. She kissed me, and we wept
Together.

CHORUS. When the midnight deepens round us,
And no other help we see,
Father, help us! Father, save us!
All our cry is unto Thee,
Miserere Domine.

THE QUEEN (*asleep.*) Miserere Domine.

Loud knocking. Melville springs to the door and opens it. Two men-at-arms are seen standing outside. Enter Paulet, followed by other soldiers. The Queen starts from her bed.

THE QUEEN. Great Heaven! What noise was that? The solid walls
Tremble around me. Ah! The King! My husband!
Oh! In this land of savages—not men—
Is there no mercy? They attempt his life.
Call out the guard! a moment lost is ruin!
To Kirk-o'-Field! To horse! We lead ourselves!
Pray God it be not late!

JANE KENNEDY. Oh! Madame! Madame!

THE QUEEN. What is it, child, and who are these who stand
So silently about, as though ashamed?

JANE KENNEDY. Well may they be so.

PAULET. Are you ready, Madame?
Their Lordships wait.

THE QUEEN. Ready? Ready for what, sir?
Ah! I remember now.

MELVILLE. For love of Christ
Be gentle with her. For this bloody deed
They answer who are higher than yourself;
But for the manner of it that is yours.
Her son, bethink you, will be England's King.

THE QUEEN. My son! my son! Ah, Melville, you remind me
Of what I would forget. I have no son.
We thank you, sir, for your most courteous summons.
Excuse us to their Lordships. We will keep them
Only a little. To such company
We may not come except as suits our station.

PAULET. Madame, we will return in half an hour.
Expect no further grace.

THE QUEEN. We are ill used
To plead for grace. To one about to pass
So soon away from time half hours seem short.
Now, sirs, some of you have fair wives at home,
And some have sisters. All must therefore know
How deep a matter is a lady's toilet.
We pray you leave us.

Exeunt Paulet, Melville, *and* Soldiers.

THE QUEEN. And now, my children, for the last, last time.
But do not let your tasks prevent the music

Wherewith so oft', through all our weary years,
You have beguiled the gloom of our dark thoughts.
In this last hour, if but your hearts consent,
For you are loth to lose as I to stay,
Bring back to us awhile the pleasant past,
Rather than leave me lonely where I am.

CHORUS. Deck her as it were a bridal,
As in merry days of old;
In delightful France we robed her
Till all wondered to behold.
Oh! dear mistress! oh! we cannot
For our hearts are sad and cold.

II.

Songs of sunny France no longer
From reluctant lips may rise,
Praise of snowy breast, and wonder
Of white brow and kindling eyes.
Praise of glowing cheek where laughter
In enchanting passion lies.

THE QUEEN. Think you my people credit what is said?

JANE KENNEDY. We who know best, believe no idle tales.

THE QUEEN. Indeed light women have few women friends,
Your love shall plead for me with those unborn.

CHORUS. Red beneath, that no sad river
Of her sacred blood may stain,
That all beautiful as ever
E'en in death she still may reign.
Red for blood of traitor's fleeing
From the avenging hosts of Spain.

THE QUEEN. Have I done well? In presence of the end
No more revenge upon our own seems justice.
In this dark life, all evidence being tainted,
We know not all, and may not judge—not judge——

CHORUS. Black above for sorrow-laden
Hearts that she must leave behind.
Black for stern remorse to torture
Sister cruel, son unkind ;
For the unrelenting furies
That pursue the guilty mind.

THE QUEEN. Nay ! nay ! For her repentance, but for him
Only regret. He does not, cannot know.

CHORUS. Chains of gold upon her bosom,
On her heart a golden cross,
Pearls upon the faded tresses
That once rivalled them in gloss.
Pearls that we may treasure after
To remind us of our loss.

THE QUEEN. And now the crown that we were wont to wear
In happy France. Of that they have not robbed us.

CHORUS. Crown, alas, that weight of honour
Which has bowed her to the tomb.
Crown that sparkled once upon her
Less resplendent than her bloom ;
Crown that but reminds of greatness
Which has darkened into doom.

THE QUEE . Now all is ready, and the end at hand.

CHORUS. Oh, the moments, fleeting moments !
Oh, the sad, untimely fate !
Scheming statesmen ! perjured judges !
Rival's unforgiving hate !
And those nameless, masked and murderous,
Who beside the scaffold wait !

THE QUEEN. Not that these trifling toys can longer please,
Nor that the broken heart finds joy in splendour.
But that the world may know me unsubdued.
That she may hear, whose hate has still pursued me,
That we no jot of dignity abate,
In place her equal as in birth her better.
That Scotland find us worthy of her kings ;
And that our son from this day's bloody work
Take honour, not disgrace, and stung to manhood
Gain mettle where he lacks. Now kneel, my children,
When others failed me you have faithful been,
And from the fulness of my gratitude
To you my bursting heart o'erflows in blessings.
May you be happy, and find happy homes :
True to one task you will be true to all,
And they'll be blessed who call you wives and mothers.
Keep in your hearts her memory who loved you
And this I charge you. In the coming hour
We play a part in memorable scene.
The eyes of Europe, and of future ages
Now watch how we acquit ourselves therein.
Distract me not in my tremendous task;
Though I be firm, forget not that my will
Holds hundred piteous thoughts subdued within,
Which else might rise and melt me into tears.

(*Steps are heard outside.*)

They come, they come. You know they have denied me
The consolations of our blessed faith.
I must alone to Him. Permit them not
To trouble me too soon.

The Queen kneels alone at the altar—loud knocking—Jane Kennedy opens the door and stands in it.

JANE KENNEDY. You may not yet. Her Majesty's in prayer.

Enter Paulet, Melville, *and* Soldiers.

PAULET. No more delay, or we shall drag her forth. Such are our orders.

They force their way in The Chorus place themselves between them and the Queen, and come forward chanting with uplifted hands.

I.

CHORUS. As you hope for mercy, leave her ;
As you fear the future stand—
You have sisters, wives and mothers,
Pitying, hold the impious hand.
She is friendless and forsaken,
Stranger in a foreign land.

II

Cloud of death descends upon her—
She nor fears, nor asks delay.
Only prays to One above us,
To support her on her way.
All must follow in her footsteps,
Standing where she stands to-day.

III.

Lay not up for great hereafter,
Expiation of such sin ;
Terror for the time, when phantoms
Of the past their work begin.
Horror for the hour when all things
Fade—except the fear within.

The Queen rises and comes forward—her women behind her.

PAULET. Madame, you come alone. 'Tis not allowed
For these to follow.

THE QUEEN. I am Queen of Scotland,
And have been Queen of France. Of the blood-royal
Of England—your mistress' nearest kin—
For very shame she dare not this refuse.

Melville speaks earnestly to Paulet, who then comes forward.

PAULET. Two of your ladies, Madame, may attend you.

THE QUEEN. We thank you, Sir.

PAULET. But there must be no scenes.

THE QUEEN. The scene, Sir, shall be worthy of the actors
In all the parts.

The Queen reaches out her hand to Jane Kennedy and another lady, who remain behind, the others fall back. As the Queen moves forward, Melville falls on his knees before her sobbing.

MELVILLE. Madame, forgive—forgive my share in this.
Had I not urged to try for liberty,
All had been well.

THE QUEEN. We do not blame you, Melville.
They had the larger means, not keener wit.
'Tis better as it is. We go to death,
As to the liberty so long denied.
Now, that our thoughts are fled from all things here,
We have forgiven all. Much more a friend
Who served us well. Arise! we need your arm.

MELVILLE. Madame, my life it might be, but not there—
I cannot lead you there.

THE QUEEN. Sad service, truly,
We ask it not again. And here is one,
Who though against us will not this refuse.

Paulet offers his arm to the Queen.

We thank you, sir. This trouble is the last
That I shall ever give you.

Exeunt all.

SCENE II.—The Hall of Execution.

The scaffold on the right. The Commissioners and others on the left. Two men, bearing masks, stand on each side of the scaffold.

Enter the Queen and her train. All present instinctively rise and uncover. The Queen bows, and moves slowly to the scaffold. Paulet takes his place in front, a paper in his hand, from which he prepares to read. The Queen ascends the scaffold and kneels down, making the sign of the cross and clasping a crucifix in her hands. Every time Paulet tries to read her voice rises above his as she prays aloud.

Paulet. Madame, the penalty of all your crimes
Is now to be exacted——

The Queen. We forgive
All slanderers, all unsteadfast friends, and those
Who by false evidence have brought us here.

Paulet. For that you plotted to betray your husband
And caused his death——

The Queen. Trusting to meet above
The father of our son whom we have loved.

PAULET. For that your paramour——

THE QUEEN. All violence
Against our person, and all wrongs we've suffered
Leaving to other hands the punishment.

PAULET. For that you planned escape——

THE QUEEN. All those who've held us
In cruel bondage without right or justice.

PAULET. For that you plotted to destroy the Queen——

THE QUEEN. All who have used our name without our sanction.
Torn from our servants' perjured evidence
By cruel tortures, which they disavowed
Ere dying in their shame. All, all we forgive
As we ourselves for Heaven's forgiveness hope.

PAULET. You are condemned——

THE QUEEN. We welcome death as sleep.
And to the highest hands our spirit yield.

The Queen rises and approaches the block. The Executioners fall on their knees before her.

EXECUTIONERS. Madame, forgive us.

THE QUEEN. As you forget not where true mercy lies.

The Executioners offer to assist the Queen in removing her dress. She motions them away, saying to Jane Kennedy—

THE QUEEN. Never before had I such grooms in waiting.

Her women remove the black dress and ornaments, leaving the Queen robed from head to foot in red. Her women begin to weep.

THE QUEEN. No, no. Weep not. Have I not promised for you ?

The Queen again kneels at the block. Her eyes are bound with a handkerchief. She bends forward her head. Then she suddenly starts back, raises her hands to heaven, and once more prays aloud.

THE QUEEN. Our son we pardon. If we've willed in anger
Our throne to others, we repent, and pray
That it may fail. May he yet live to join
These kingdoms in one state. Oh ! may his arms
Conquer an Empire wide as that of Rome,
Till of our blood arise a happier Queen,
To rule in priceless peace, as we had done
Had fate not cast us on unquiet times.

The Queen lays her head on the block, supporting herself with her hands. The Executioners on each side bend down and remove the hands. Then the axe is raised amid general weeping, and the curtain falls.

THE END.

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